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SUBJECT: CODEL DAVIS VISITS CARACAS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM R. BROWNFIELD FOR REASON 1.4 D

Summary

1. (U) Representative Tom Davis (R-VA), Chairman of the House Government Reform Committee, led a Congressional delegation to Venezuela on May 31 and June 1. The delegation which included Rep. Candice Miller (R-MI), Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD), Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) focused on regional and bilateral cooperation in fighting narcotics trafficking and terrorism. The delegation met with Minister of Interior and Justice Jesse Chacon, Vice-President Jose Vicente Rangel, and members of Venezuela's National Assembly. The Delegation also took part in the dedication of a joint U.S.-Venezuelan X-ray operator training center at Caracas' Maiquetia Airport. End Summary.

Minister of Interior and Justice

2. (C) On May 31, the delegation met with Venezuelan Interior and Justice Minister Jesse Chacon for about an hour. The Ambassador was excluded from the meeting, but the delegation did share elements of the conversation. They said that the meeting was generally positive if not particularly productive. According to Rep. Maloney, the delegation felt there was common ground between the two countries for cooperation on fighting drugs, terrorism, and trafficking in persons. Rep. Davis told Emboffs that Chacon had confirmed that he was aware that the GOV had not yet completed the necessary paperwork for the request to extradite alleged terrorist Luis Posada Carriles.

Vice President Rangel

3. (C) On June 1, in a last-minute meeting called by the GOV, the delegation met with Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel in his office. Reps. Davis, Maloney, Miller, and Ruppersberger attended. (Note: At the same time Rep. Wolf attended a previously scheduled meeting at the National Assembly). The Ambassador was initially invited to the meeting but was informed en-route to the Vice President's office that he would not be included. Emboff attended the meeting which lasted for about 45 minutes.

4. (C) Rep. Davis presented Rangel with some of the gifts that he had originally brought to present to President Hugo Chavez. Rep. Davis talked about lowering the level of rhetoric in the bilateral relationship, and Rangel insisted that he was very interested in working with the U.S. on improving relations since the two countries have historically had good relations. Rangel insisted that "we have no hostile attitude towards the U.S." and that he was not anti-U.S. but instead was an admirer of the U.S.

5. (C) Rangel identified the petroleum trade, drug trafficking, and fighting terrorism as areas where the U.S. and Venezuela can work together. Rangel highlighted the 2002 strike as the only interruption in Venezuelan oil supply to the U.S., referring to the strike as "sabotage" and "terrorism." The Vice President complained to the delegation about President Bush's meeting with Maria Corina Machado of Sumate, a leading Venezuelan civil society NGO, a day earlier. Rangel asked why President Bush had received her when he would not receive GOV figures, saying that "she doesn't represent anyone in Venezuela" and that the meeting was "an affront to President Chavez." He added that Bush probably met with her "because she has a pretty face and pretty legs." Rangel said Machado had been part of the coup attempt against Chavez, had signed the decree promulgated by the short-lived government of Pedro Carmona in April 2002, and was an indicted criminal.

6. (C) Regarding GOV interest in extraditing alleged terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, Rangel claimed that Venezuela had no interest in magnifying the case or using it for

anti-American politics. He said extradition would guarantee a fair trial with due process, and that if he comes to Venezuela, Posada "won't be sent to Cuba- absolutely not!" He also said that since Posada is over 70 years old, he wouldn't be subject to prison, but would only be subject to house arrest.

Ambush at the National Assembly

17. (U) While other members of the delegation were meeting with Vice President Rangel, Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) and delegation staff faced a room full of reporters in what the Embassy had scheduled as a private discussion of Venezuela's proposed Organized Crime Law at the National Assembly. After exchanging formalities with Boston Group deputies and members of the Internal Policy Committee, Rep. Wolf said he was concerned that undemocratic actions by the GOV were threatening the historically friendly ties between the United States and Venezuela. Warning that Sumate leader Maria Corina Machado was becoming a "folk hero," he said his subcommittee would commit additional funds to Sumate in response to GOV actions against the organization.

18. (U) MVR deputy Calixto Ortega responded that the Sumate issue was too complicated to resolve in such a meeting but invited Rep. Wolf to investigate the facts, which Ortega said would show Machado had been involved in the attempted coup against President Chavez in 2002. MVR deputy Iris Varela entered the chamber, demanded the microphone, and began loudly denouncing U.S. foreign policy. Varela called President Bush's meeting with Machado the preceding day a "smokescreen" aimed at distracting the Venezuelan public from Washington's "protection" of Luis Posada Carriles. She called Machado a fugitive, a coup-plotter, and a CIA agent who had participated in electoral fraud. She criticized the delegation for sending only one member of Congress to the meeting. Rep. Wolf responded to Varela by inviting those present to the House-Senate prayer breakfast and apologizing that the other members were unable to attend because of their last-minute meeting with VP Rangel.

NAS Facility Dedication

19. (U) The delegation wrapped up its visit at a ceremony at Caracas' Maiquetia Airport to dedicate a new X-Ray Operator Training Facility that is being funded by the Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section. At a brief ceremony, Ambassador Brownfield, Rep. Davis, and Jorge Gonzalez, head of Maiquetia airport security each gave brief remarks followed by a ribbon cutting and a short tour of the facility. Non-official press was banned from the ceremony by the GOV, though Ambassador Brownfield and Rep. Davis were able to speak to the press in another location at the airport shortly before the delegation departed.

110. (U) Codel Davis was unable to clear this cable before departure.
Brownfield

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